Some Etiquette Regarding Requests for Letters of Reference

During your time at La Follette, and thereafter, you will be confronted by the necessity of obtaining letters of recommendation. While writing letters of reference are a part of faculty duties, it is important to recognize that writing these letters are sometimes, depending upon the circumstances, very time-consuming activities. Hence, you should consider your requests carefully, and *think ahead*. The following points may be helpful to you to remember.

- **1. Timing.** Ask for a letter of reference well in advance of the time you need it (with 4 weeks a preferable minimum). You are probably not the only one making such a request at any given time.
- **2. Relevance.** Only ask professors who have had some time to come to know you and to observe your performance in a class or project assistantship. Don't assume the professor can write a favorable letter just because you are a student in the program; their written word must be credible and based on substance.
- **3. Supporting materials.** At the time that you ask and the professor agrees to provide a letter, supply all relevant information about yourself (resume, personal statement, other useful information, perhaps including the relevant organization's website) and about the letter requirements (such as the due date and any special instructions). Plan to provide a stamped, pre-addressed envelope for the letter.
- **4. Timing, again.** Remember that there will be peak times in which these types of request hit your professors (particularly in spring with job and internship applications), so try to make your request earlier if possible to allow more time.